

Glory and our spiritual life

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JOURNEY TOWARD HOLINESS

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By Sister Mary Garascia

Once upon a time, in an old Victorian house behind the baseboards, there lived a mama mouse. Every night mama mouse would creep carefully out to look for crumbs for her family in the big old kitchen. One night, she had not gone far before she encountered the house cat, usually asleep at this time. As the cat was about to pounce, the mouse stood up on her hind feet, puffed out her cheeks, and barked like a Great Dane. The frightened cat fled. The moral of this story? It always pays to speak a second language!

We Catholics all do speak a second language: the language of our liturgy and sacraments. As members of the Catholic faith community, our personal spirituality—our own way of relating to God—is meant to be nourished by participating in liturgy. But due to lack of liturgical information and formation encountered by the average Catholic, a lot of the richness of the language of liturgy undoubtedly falls on liturgically deaf ears. In this little column we can't explore even a whole Mass, much less all liturgy and sacraments. I'd like just to take one word, GLORY, and invite us to consider its riches.

We encounter this word often as Catholics in the little prayer, the Glory Be (Glory to God the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit), and the greater Gloria, the hymn we sing at Mass.

"Glory" was a word that Jesus and his followers knew from their Jewish tradition. Like us, the Hebrews acknowledged that there is a Holy Mystery greater than the human person, greater than and source of all that is. The Holy God of Hebrew scripture is a strong God of power and might, able to defeat the enemies of the Hebrews and rule the winds and sea, a God "on high." Humans, by contrast, are dust, "swept away like a dream, like grass which springs up in the morning [and] ... by evening withers" (Ps 90). God is transcendent, the One alone worthy of worship. We express the highest praise we are capable of when we say "Glory to God."

Besides praise, there is also another important meaning of the word "Glory" in Hebrew scripture. Glory means a manifestation of God, a "showing." God could not be seen, but effects of God's presence could be—in light, cloud, pillars of fire, wind. Also seen were God's mighty works: creation, the exodus, other interventions in Hebrew history, the miracles of the Prophets.

So God's glorious works were a way that the high God was experienced as close, walking with the chosen people, immersed in their messy times and history. This immanent God becomes supremely exemplified in the Emmanuel, Jesus of Nazareth, the greatest manifestation or Glory or work of the Father and the Spirit. By his own work of revealing and establishing God's kingdom, Jesus in turn

glorifies his Father. As he prepares to die, he tells his Father: "I have glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do (John 17:4)."

In our Christian theology, another work of God and his Christ is the human person, with a positive spin. A familiar saying attributed to St. Irenaeus is "the Glory of God is man fully alive." We ourselves are filled with the life of God. In imitation of Jesus and his precepts, we also do the works of God. As we continue to do this, we grow in holiness; we ourselves are "glorified" by becoming more like Christ. "Glory to God in the highest" is an acclamation or shout of praise of God and praise of his mighty works, and that includes our very selves.

A little history of our important Gloria hymn at Mass: In his two volume *The Mass of the Roman Rite* (V1:346-7; 356), liturgical scholar Joseph Jungmann says it was composed by an unknown private person using biblical words and phrases. It was a song of thanksgiving, a festive song that captured the "religious inspiration" of the century. A tradition says the Gloria may have been used for Christmas Mass as early as about 130 CE by Pope Telesphorus. By this time the Gospel of Matthew, with its story of Jesus' birth, was in circulation.

The unknown author of the Gloria quotes the proclamation of the Angels to the shepherds from Matthew's Gospel: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will." It seems that early Christians were just as inspired by the Christmas story as we are! At any rate, by the late fourth century the Gloria was in limited use in the Eucharistic liturgies of Popes and Bishops. In the next centuries it gradually became part of Sunday and feast day liturgies in Western Christianity (except during Lent and Advent).

The Gloria is part of the Introductory Rites of Mass. It wakes us up to the reason why we are at Mass, and we need that waking up. We live in a culture with an increasingly shorter attention span, easily distracted, busy about many things, constantly "connected." It is hard to be contemplative, quiet, receptive. The Gloria welcomes us to dedicated time where the only thing we really need to do is worship God. The Gloria sung lustily gets our attention and awakens our desire for God. So let's belt it out, folks! And may we all become more aware of the Glory of God at work in us and in our worlds.

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